Coordinates: 51°30′10″N 0°7′27″W

Crime Museum

The **Crime Museum** is a collection of criminal memorabilia kept at New Scotland Yard, headquarters of the Metropolitan Police Service in London, England. Known as the **Black Museum** until the early 21st century, the museum came into existence at Scotland Yard sometime in 1874, arising out of the collection of prisoners' property gathered as a result of the Forfeiture Act 1870 and intended as an aid to the police in their study of crime and criminals. Initially unofficial, it had become an official if private museum by 1875, with a police inspector and a police constable assigned to official duty there. Not open to the public, it was used as a teaching collection for police recruits and was only ever accessible those involved in legal matters, royals and other VIPs.[1]

The Crime Museum in its former home at New Scotland Yard, 8–10 Broadway (now demolished)

Now sited in the basement of the Curtis Green Building (the present New Scotland Yard), the museum remains closed to the public but can be visited by officers of the Metropolitan Police and any of the country's police forces by prior appointment. A major exhibition of artefacts from the museum, The Crime Museum Uncovered, was held at the Museum of London from 9 October 2015 to 10 April 2016.[2] Though this was the only time a large number of exhibits have been displayed to the public, individual objects have been loaned to other exhibitions, such as a cigarette lighter with a hidden compartment from the Krogers at the Science Museum in 2019–20.[3]

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History

Origins

In his 1993 book *The Black Museum: New Scotland Yard*, the Museum's then-curator Bill Waddell asserted that its origins lay in an 1869 Act giving the police authority to either destroy items used in the commission of a crime or retain them for instructional purposes, when previous to that Act they had been retained by the police until reclaimed by their owners.[4] No such Act was passed in 1869[5] and this misapprehension seems to originate in a misdated mention of the Forfeiture Act 1870 in an 1877 newspaper report on the Museum :

> "Formerly all property of any kind belonging to convicted felons went to the Crown, but by an Act passed, we believe, in 1869, this was altered, and whatever is found on them now is retained till their sentences have been completed, when they can come back to this house [i.e. the Museum] and claim their own. This law does not, of course, apply to cases of unlawful possession, such as tools for burglary, which are never given up, or see the light again."[6]

The 1870 Act abolished forfeiture of property for felony and treason - instead it vested that property's "custody and management" in an "administrator", who would then return it at the end of the prisoner's sentence[7].

The Black Museum was conceived in 1874 by Neame, a serving inspector[8], who at that time had collected together a number of items, with the intention of giving police officers practical instruction on how to detect and prevent crime. By the latter part of 1874, official authority was given for a crime museum to be opened.[9] Neame, with the help of a P.C. Randall, gathered together sufficient material of both old and new cases—initially pertaining to exhibits found in the possession of burglars and thieves—to enable a museum to be subsequently opened. The actual date in 1875 when the Black Museum opened is not known, but the permanent appointment of Neame and Randall to duty in the Prisoners Property Store on 12 April suggests that the museum may have come into being in the latter part of that year.[10]

There was no official opening of the museum, whose first two years saw a steady increase in visitors, particularly by CID officers being instructed in the museum as part of their training, keeping it in constant use. However, no record of visitors was kept until 6 October 1877, when a group of dignitaries were shown round the collection by Commissioner Sir Edmund Henderson, KCB and Assistant Commissioners Lt. Col. Labalmondiere and Capt. Harris. They were the first entries in a visitors' book which ran until 1894 and - though not all visitors were asked to sign it - it contains many notable figures from the period. One reporter from *The Observer* newspaper was refused admittance by Inspector Neame and on 8 April 1877 that journalist coined the name 'Black Museum' for the collection.

1890-present

In 1890 the museum moved with the Metropolitan Police Office to new premises at the other end of Whitehall,[11] on the newly constructed Thames Embankment. The building, constructed by Norman Shaw RA, and made of granite quarried by convicts on Dartmoor, was called New Scotland Yard. A set of rooms in the basement housed the museum and, although there was no Curator as such, PC Randall was responsible for keeping the place tidy, adding to exhibits, vetting applications for visits and arranging dates for them. The museum was closed during both World War I and II, and in 1967, with the move of New Scotland Yard to new premises in Victoria Street, S.W.1, the museum was housed in rooms on the second floor, which underwent several renovations.

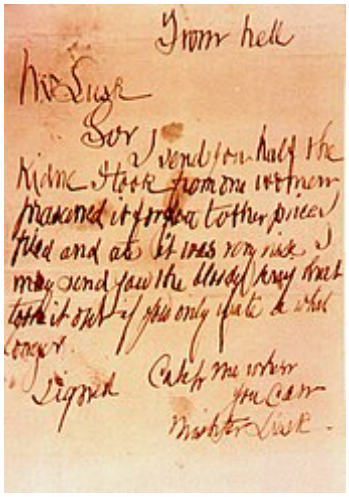
Early in the 21st century the Museum was renamed the Crime Museum and moved to the basement of the newly refurbished and extended Curtis Green Building. It reopened in 2018 in a "dark and dramatic" room designed by Allford Hall Monaghan Morris in collaboration with engineering consultancy Arup[12][13][14].

Collections

The museum contains historic collections and more recent artefacts, including a substantial collection of melee weapons, some overt, some concealed all of which have been used in murders or serious assaults in London, these include shotguns disguised as umbrellas and numerous walking-stick swords. The museum also contains a selection of hangman's nooses, including that used to perform the UK's last-ever execution and death masks made for executed criminals. There are also displays from famous cases which include Charlie Peace and letters allegedly written by Jack the Ripper.

The more recent exhibits on display include the ricin-filled pellet that killed Bulgarian dissident Georgi Markov in 1978, a model of the possible umbrella that fired the pellet, the fake De Beers diamond from the Millennium Dome heist and Dennis Nilsen's actual stove.

Other items no longer on public display include items that once belonged to Charles Black, the most prolific counterfeiter in the Western Hemisphere. These include a set of printing plates, a remarkable series of forged banknotes, and a cunningly hollowed-out kitchen door once used to conceal them.



The From Hell letter, allegedly from Jack the Ripper

The museum hosts more than 500 exhibits, each preserved at a constant temperature of sixty-two degrees Fahrenheit.[15]

Cases on display

- Udham Singh was an Indian revolutionary who shot and killed Michael O'Dwyer, the former Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab in British India
- Ruth Ellis was the last woman to be executed in the United Kingdom, after being convicted of the murder of her lover, David Blakely.
- John Reginald Halliday Christie was a notorious English serial killer active in the 1940s and early 1950s[16]
- Stratton Brothers case refers to the Stratton Brothers who were the first men to be convicted in Great Britain for murder based on fingerprint evidence[17]
- John George Haigh was an English serial killer, active between 1944 and 1949[18]
- Neville Heath, an English killer who was responsible for the murders of at least two young women, and who was executed in London in 1946
- Dennis Nilsen, a serial killer and necrophiliac, also known as the Muswell Hill Murderer and the Kindly Killer, who committed the murders of 15 young men in London, England
- Thomas Neill Cream, also known as the Lambeth Poisoner, was a Scottish-born serial killer[19]
- The overalls of P.C. Keith Blakelock, who was stabbed to death in the Broadwater Farm housing estate in 1985, are kept in the Black Museum. Several people have been charged with his murder but acquitted. The Met continues to pursue others involved in his murder[20]

Neville Heath. Hanged for murder in 1946.

- A cast of the hole drilled into the vault wall during the Hatton Garden safe deposit burglary is on display. During the long weekend of Easter Bank Holiday in April 2015, four thieves burgled deposit boxes with a value up to £200 million[21]

In other media

In 1951 British commercial radio producer Harry Alan Towers produced a radio series hosted by Orson Welles called *The Black Museum*, inspired by the catalogue of items on display. Each week, the programme featured an item from the museum and a dramatization of the story surrounding the object to the macabre delight of audiences. Often mistakenly cited as a BBC production, Towers commercially syndicated the programme throughout the English-speaking world. The American radio writer Wyllis Cooper also wrote and directed a similar anthology for NBC that ran at the same time in the U. S. called *Whitehall 1212*, for the telephone number of Scotland Yard, the program debuted on 18 November 1951, and was hosted by Chief Superintendent John Davidson, curator of the Black Museum.

- There is a fictional Black Museum, inspired by the actual one, inside the Grand Hall of Justice in the *Judge Dredd* comic strip.
- A fictional version of the Black Museum is often referred to in the *Dylan Dog* comic series and, in some stories, exhibits are stolen from the museum.
- In the 1944 film *The Lodger*, Inspector Warwick (George Sanders) gives a tour of the museum to Kitty Langley (Merle Oberon).
- A 1958 horror film called *Horrors of the Black Museum* references the Black Museum in a story of a crime writer (played by Michael Gough) who commits grisly murders in order to write articles and books about them for public consumption.
- The fourth series of Charlie Brooker's *Black Mirror* has an episode called "Black Museum".
- Tony Parsons wrote about the Black Museum in his books about detective Max Wolfe.
- A radio drama series featuring Orson Welles was produced and aired in 1952–53, with some episodes loosely based on real cases.

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External links

- New Scotland Yard's Black Museum tour on DVD (https://web.archive.org/web/20181227051820/http://www.themuseumofcrime.com/) (archived)
- Friends' statement (https://web.archive.org/web/20120716212839/http://www.met.police.uk/history/friends.htm) (archived)
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- Discussion of *Whitehall 1212* (https://web.archive.org/web/20050220084538/http://blogs.salon.com/0003139/2004/05/23.html)
- Black Museum radio program episodes at archive.org (https://archive.org/details/OTRR_Black_Museum_Singles)
- Free downloads of The Black Museum old time radio shows at Zoot Radio (http://zootradio.com/Black_Museum.php)

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